

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) Apparatus for postoperatively compressing a bone graft between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

a spinal fixation device including first and second discrete plates each having a pair of generally laterally aligned openings for cooperation with fasteners to secure the plates to respective vertebrae on opposite sides of the bone graft;

said first and second plates having respective first and second sets of interlocking elements cooperable with one another to enable progressive postoperative advancement of the plates toward one another and to lock the plates to one another in a plurality of advanced positions precluding movement of the plates away from one another in each said advanced position for progressively compressing the bone graft between the adjacent vertebrae, one of said first and second plates including a cantilevered leg mounting one of said first and second sets of interlocking elements for flexing movement toward and away from another of said first and second sets of interlocking elements to enable the progressive advancement and locking of said plates to one another.

2. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said plates are interlocked in said positions in response to movement of said plates toward one another.

3. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said interlocking elements include ratchet teeth cooperable between said first and second plates, respectively.

4. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said first plate has a male projection and said second plate includes a female recess for receiving the male projection, margins of said male projection and said female recess having said interlocking elements therealong cooperable to preclude the first and second plates from movement away from one another in each said plurality of advanced positions.

5. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 4 wherein said male projection includes a pair of legs with a slot therebetween enabling said legs to flex toward and away from one another.

6. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said interlocking elements include a plurality of projections carried by said first plate and a plurality of recesses carried by said second plate, and means for biasing said projections laterally relative to said recesses enabling movement of the first and second plates toward one another while preventing movement of said first and second plates away from one another.

7. (Currently Amended) Apparatus according to Claim 1 ~~7~~ wherein said first plate has a male projection and said second plate includes a female recess for receiving

the male projection, said male projection and said female recess lying generally coplanar, margins of said male projection and said female recess having said interlocking elements therealong cooperable to prevent the first and second plates from movement away from one another in each said plurality of advanced positions, said projections being carried along opposite sides of said male projection and said recesses being formed along opposite sides of the female recess.

8. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 including a stop cooperable between said first and second plates for preventing movement of said first and second plates toward one another in response to obtaining a predetermined advanced position of said plates relative to one another.

9. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said first and second plates are curved in directions normal to one another.

10. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 1 wherein said plates are aligned with one another in the direction of movement of the plates toward one another, and a guide carried by one of said first and second plates and cooperable with a guide carried by another of said first and second plates to prevent displacement of said plates relative to one another in a direction tending to misalign said plates.

11. (Previously Presented) Apparatus according to Claim 10 wherein said guide on one of said plates includes a channel along a margin of said one plate, another of said plates having a margin engageable in said channel.

Cancel claims 12-23.

24. (New) Apparatus for postoperatively compressing a bone graft between adjacent vertebrae, comprising:

a spinal fixation device including first and second discrete plates each having a pair of generally laterally aligned openings for cooperation with fasteners to secure the plates to respective vertebrae on opposite sides of the bone graft, said first plate including a male projection and said second plate including a female recess for receiving the male projection;

said male projection and said female recess of said first and second plates, respectively, having first and second sets of ratchet teeth cooperable with one another to enable progressive postoperative displacement of the plates relative to one another in a first direction to shorten the distance between the openings of the respective plates and thereby progressively compress the bone graft between the adjacent vertebrae and to lock the plates to one another in a plurality of progressively displaced positions precluding movement of the plates in a second direction opposite said first direction, said male projection including a pair of legs having margins carrying said first set of ratchet and a slot between said legs enabling said legs to flex toward and away from said second set of

ratchet teeth carried by margins of said female recess in response to said relative displacement of the plates in said first direction.

25. (New) Apparatus according to claim 24 wherein said legs flex in a lateral direction.

26. (New) A method for postoperatively compressing a bone graft between adjacent spinal vertebrae comprising the steps of:

securing a first plate of a spinal fixation device to vertebrae adjacent one side of a bone graft;

securing a second plate of the spinal fixation device to a vertebrae adjacent an opposite side of the bone graft;

releasably interlocking said first and second plates in a first position relative to one another;

postoperatively advancing the plates from said first position toward one another into a second position relative to one another in response to movement of the vertebrae toward one another; and

locking the plates to one another in said second advanced position from said first position precluding movement of the plates away from one another to maintain the bone graft between the adjacent vertebrae under compression.